

“Traits of Highly Effective Moms”

Proverbs 31:10-31

for Mothers’ Day, May 9, 2010

I believe that our understanding of Mother’s Day is too limited. Often Mother’s Day is the exclusive property of the one who gave us birth, or perhaps to the one who raised us. Certainly we should be honoring those women, but the celebration should not stop there. That’s only the beginning. Biblically we expand things a bit with the characteristics of a good wife. Now a wife and a mother are not necessarily interchangeable though there are many common traits. But still I am not sure that inclusion of wives is sufficient. We need to go beyond that. I think we need to honor those women who meet certain criteria, those who have the traits of highly effective Moms.

Highly effective moms bring forth life. That’s pretty basic, but it should not be limited to physical birth. That excludes too many. Remember that Jesus talked about a second birth, a birth of the spirit. Highly effective moms create an atmosphere where the spirit can come alive, where the joys and tears of life can be heard, felt, and experienced. Moms move us from the dark womb in which we began to the bright light of God’s love. Such moms should be honored today.

Once there is life, highly effective moms anticipate the needs of a child, and they work to supply those needs. They give nourishment in a form that can be easily ingested, even if they have to give something of themselves to make it happen. They offer the food that will allow this young life to grow and mature. Whether it is physical food or spiritual food, sometimes the child rebels, or spits out that which they have been given. An effective mom will clean that child, will give them the exercise, attention, and rest that they need so that new life can grow to maturity, not only physically, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Such moms should be honored today.

Highly effective moms are nurturers, encouragers, and teachers. Of course sometimes the teachings don’t sound all that encouraging, but often we need to learn what not to do before we can learn what to do. Every good mom says “No” with regularity. But they also hold and cuddle us when we fall, when life’s bumps and bruises hit. They teach not just with their words, but with their actions and attitudes. And effective moms will teach their children about compassion and grace for others, will show kindness and mercy. They will raise their child on hope and faith that they might live in grace. Such moms should be honored today.

Moms keep track of schedules. They get their children where they need to go. The relatively new societal term is “soccer moms.” Why not “soccer dads?” Because largely it is the effective mom who sees and determines where that child needs to be, and then gets them there, whether it be soccer or music lessons or school or church. Such moms should be honored today.

Perhaps the toughest thing on the list of highly effective moms is to know when it is time to let go. It is the desire of every mom to keep their child from the hurts and pains that come with life. Yet it is often through those personal pains that the younger ones learn to grow and mature, that hearts and minds are transformed, that we turn toward compassion and grace. There comes a time when the parent must back away so the child can fight their own battles, earn their own victories, and make their own mistakes; a time when the child will be a child no longer, but an adult making their way in the world. The child is never abandoned. A bird will push the baby out of the nest, but then will follow to make sure they can fly. And the child is always welcomed back into the nest, into the home, into the nurturing, welcoming arms of that highly effective mom. And sometimes effective moms become children again, that they might receive the care, compassion, and grace that they once taught the child, that the child can now offer to them. Such moms should be honored today.

Highly effective moms bring forth life. They anticipate and meet needs. They nurture, encourage and teach. They work to get young ones where they need to be. And they know when to let go. Such moms are young and old, female and male, of all colors, from all places. That is who we are to honor today. And as you go forth today, may you go to honor all those highly effective moms who brightened or strived to enrich your life. Prove yourself to be a loving child. Then go forth to become a highly effective mom yourself. That God’s kingdom might grow; that peace and grace may abound. In your life may it be so. Amen.

“The Family of God”

Romans 8:12-17

for Festival of the Christian Home, May 9, 2010

“You did not receive a spirit of slavery, but a spirit of adoption.” (Romans 8:15) In a couple of weeks my family is going to celebrate an important anniversary. On May 26, 1988, Nancy, Amy, and I drove to the JFK airport in New York to meet a plane arriving from Korea. On that flight was an 18 month old boy named Cho Ha Bin. There was more

legal work yet to be done but on that day, Cho Ha Bin became Joseph Jeremiah, and we adopted that child into our family.

It wasn't an easy process. It took years. It took one full year just to get on the waiting list and to be accepted into classes to be trained and approved to receive a child. After classes were completed, it took more than a year until we got word that a child was available. And a few more months passed until he could make the flight over.

Looking back there are a couple of memories that stand out. One was the anxiety and frustration in trying to get everything done so this adoption could happen. Every time we turned around there seemed to be something more that was necessary: a paper filed, a bill paid, a report to be completed. And each time after our part was done; there would be a period of time when all we could do was wait and worry. Would some problem come up? Would we be accepted? Will a child be available? And since we were dealing with a foreign country, what laws or relations would affect us, delay us, disappoint us?

But there is another memory that I have of that day, and that is the extreme joy, the spirit of anticipation and celebration that carried us to the airport and back again. Our prayers had been answered and our hope fulfilled. After years of frustration, concern and worry, another child was being brought into our family. And in that moment there was a celebration of life and hope and faith. In that moment there was excitement and peace. It was a spirit of adoption.

I don't think that Joe had any sense of what was happening in his life. For a year he had been in an orphanage with a dozen other boys. The day came when he was taken to the airport for an American serviceman to escort him and two others to New York. By the time he got to us he was hungry and tired, and we were, too, but we were still running on adrenaline. But it did not take him long to understand that he was loved, that his needs would be cared for, that we would watch over him, that we would be with him no matter what. It did not take long for him to know that he was part of the family, and the opportunity, the peace, and the joy that comes with that.

Now I don't lift this up because this experience was particularly special or unique. It certainly was for us, but many others probably have gone through similar experiences. I simply relate it because it speaks of my personal experience about a spirit of adoption. And I think it can help us understand what Paul is talking about. A spirit of adoption.

Yahweh, God has always wanted people to enter into a walking, talking, supportive relationship with all of humanity. Jesus said that it is the Father's wish that not even one

might be lost, and in hopes that none would be lost, Jesus died for our sins and rose for our sake, that we might share in his shame, his pain, and his righteousness. Through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all flesh we are given the opportunity to be adopted into God's family. We are not ordered to be a part of the family. We are not to be treated like slaves who can be beaten, even killed at the least error or disobedience. We are sons and daughters who can dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Knowing what I went through, I wonder what pain and anxiety, what sort of worry invades the heart of God prior to each person's recognition and acceptance of those adoption papers? How much time is spent wondering if the adoption will ever take place? How much worry that something else might be necessary for this relationship to really begin to happen, even though Christ has already gone through Hell, literally, to see that all has been done? Conversely, how much joy erupts when even one sinner begins that journey to become one of the family.

Like Joe of 22 years ago, few of us really know or understand all that is going on when we first are surrounded by the presence of God. Suddenly a door opens and we walk into a loving, caring presence. There may be tears of sadness for what is left behind, or tears of joy for the possibilities that lie ahead. Occasionally we recognize an immediate difference and other times just the vague notion that something has changed, even though we cannot pinpoint what, or when, or how. But if we look and listen with our heart and soul, we will soon understand that we are loved; that our needs will be cared for; that God will watch over us; that He will be with us no matter what. It will not take long for us to know that we are part of the family of God, and that we can have all the peace, the power, and the joy that comes with that.

We did not receive a spirit of slavery, but a spirit of adoption. If you do not know that yet, today you can turn your life around by turning to God. Commit yourself, your heart to Christ that God may come in to you. If you need someone to talk to about this, here I am. Come to me and we will see where God leads. And if you are already part of the family, live like it. Talk to our Father often. Read the letters he has given to us for inspiration and direction. Use the gifts we've been given in a way that would make our Parent proud. And go forth to make disciples, to adopt other sisters and brothers that this family of God might grow, that none may be lost. In your life may it be so. Amen.